

# Data Centers – Land Use

Local government powers as defined by state law

- Comprehensive Plan
- Zoning Ordinance/Regulations

1. What kind of land use is a data center? Where can it be sited?
2. What process applies for review of data center within zoning ordinance?
  - By right (administrative)
  - By special exception (legislative hearing)
  - By rezoning (Planned Unit Development/Planned Area Development) (legislative hearing)

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Zoning Requirements typically addressed for data centers

- Siting requirements in zoning districts
- Building size, form, configuration, setbacks
- Water/stormwater
- Ancillary/support facilities – backup generators, cooling equipment
- Noise
- Lighting
- Architectural requirements, screening
- Fire/site security
- Energy (?)

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## Recent Planning and Zoning Examples

- Fairfax County, VA (2024) – high intensity office, industrial; venting, cooling, generating fully enclosed/screened; 40k sq feet-commercial, 80k sq feet-industrial (or special exception); setbacks from residential; at least 1 mile from Metro station. <https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/data-centers>  
<https://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/planning-development/sites/planning-development/files/Assets/Documents/PDF/data-centers-staff-report.pdf>
- Prince William County, VA (2016, 2022, 2023)– data center overlay districts, “digital gateway zone” water, architectural rules, screening, noise regulations (24 hrs). <https://www.pwcva.gov/assets/2023-01/CPA2021-00004%20BoCS%20Res. No. 22-508.pdf>
- Loudoun County, VA (pending 2025 amendments to existing comp plan and zoning) – would make all data centers “special exception” review rather than by right in districts where allowed. Comp plan amendments would not support new data centers in “urban transit center” areas. <https://www.loudoun.gov/5990/Data-Center-Standards-Locations>
- Chandler, AZ (2023) – new data centers only in PAD districts w. hearing, noise studies/mitigation, backup generator testing limits. <https://www.chandleraz.gov/sites/default/files/departments/development-services/PLH22-0053-Council-Memo.pdf>
- Things to watch: Virginia JLARC study (launched Dec. 2023, due this month) [https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/resolutions/2024\\_Data%20centers\\_JLARC.pdf](https://jlarc.virginia.gov/pdfs/resolutions/2024_Data%20centers_JLARC.pdf)